

Exclusive Cultural Event Strategies for Advancing Sustainable Tourism in Bali

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to analyze strategies for developing exclusive cultural events to support sustainable tourism in Bali by focusing on cultural preservation, community involvement, and quality visitor experiences rather than increasing tourist numbers alone.

Method: This study uses a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five experts in event management and tourism. The data were then analyzed using the SWOT framework to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the implementation of exclusive cultural events in Bali.

Result: The findings show that Bali has strong advantages, such as authentic cultural heritage, a well-known destination image, and institutional support. Opportunities also come from the growing global demand for quality tourism and collaboration across sectors. However, challenges remain, including limited human resource capacity, lack of technological innovation, and the continued dominance of mass tourism trends.

Contribution: This research contributes to event management and tourism studies by showing that curated, immersive, and community-based cultural events can become an effective strategy for sustainable tourism development. The findings can help policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and event organizers design tourism programs that protect culture, strengthen local communities, and improve destination sustainability.

Keywords: *exclusive cultural events, sustainable tourism, SWOT analysis, Bali, quality tourism.*

Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized as a key driver of regional and national economic development. Beyond its contribution to income generation, tourism also plays a significant role in improving social welfare, creating employment opportunities, stimulating infrastructure development, and facilitating cultural exchange (UNWTO, 2023). Among Indonesia's tourism destinations, Bali has emerged as the most prominent and internationally recognized island, known for its unique combination of natural landscapes, spiritual traditions, and living cultural heritage. Ritual ceremonies, traditional dances, temple architecture, local gastronomy, and community-based customs form an integrated cultural ecosystem that attracts millions of visitors annually (UNWTO, 2023; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Bali's strong destination image has made tourism a major pillar of its economy and global reputation.

Despite its success, Bali is increasingly confronted with the negative consequences of mass tourism. Rapid growth in visitor arrivals has intensified pressures on environmental resources, public infrastructure, and local communities. Traffic congestion, waste management issues, excessive land conversion, water scarcity, and overcrowding at major attractions are among the visible impacts of uncontrolled tourism growth (Seraphin et al., 2018). At the same



time, the commercialization of traditions and rituals has raised concerns regarding cultural commodification, where sacred and authentic cultural expressions risk being transformed into tourism spectacles (Cohen, 1988; Greenwood, 1989). Previous studies have shown that uncontrolled tourism expansion may lead to overtourism, ecological degradation, and social transformation that threaten the long-term sustainability of host communities (Milano et al., 2019). These conditions highlight the urgency of shifting Bali's tourism model from quantity-oriented tourism toward quality-oriented and sustainable tourism development.

In response to these challenges, the concept of quality tourism has gained increasing attention in recent years. Quality tourism emphasizes meaningful visitor experiences, higher tourist spending, longer stays, stronger respect for local culture, and awareness of environmental sustainability rather than simply increasing visitor numbers (UNWTO, 2023; OECD, 2020). This paradigm encourages destinations to focus on attracting tourists who seek authentic and responsible travel experiences while contributing positively to local economies and communities. For Bali, the quality tourism approach provides an opportunity to rebalance tourism growth with cultural preservation and environmental protection.

Within this context, cultural events have evolved from peripheral attractions into strategic instruments for destination development. Events function not only as entertainment activities but also as platforms for cultural expression, place branding, economic stimulation, and visitor engagement (Getz & Page, 2019). Well-designed events are capable of strengthening destination competitiveness by creating memorable experiences that differentiate a place from competing destinations. Contemporary tourism trends indicate that travelers increasingly seek immersive, emotional, and meaningful experiences rather than passive sightseeing (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Kim, 2014). As a result, experiential tourism has become a dominant trend, where visitors desire direct interaction with local culture, traditions, and communities.

However, most cultural events currently organized in Bali remain open-access and mass-oriented. They often prioritize visitor volume and public spectacle, while offering limited depth of engagement and minimal experiential curation. Many events function primarily as performances to be watched rather than experiences to be lived. Consequently, their potential to attract high-value tourists, increase visitor quality, and contribute to sustainability objectives has not been fully optimized (Richards, 2021). Large-scale events may also create overcrowding, environmental pressure, and superficial cultural consumption if not carefully managed.

An alternative approach can be found in the development of exclusive cultural events. These events are intentionally designed with limited participation, curated programming, controlled visitor capacity, and immersive experiences that allow visitors to engage directly with local traditions, rituals, and communities. Rather than functioning merely as spectacles, exclusive cultural events prioritize storytelling, authenticity, emotional connection, and personal interaction. Recent studies indicate that immersive and curated event formats significantly influence visitor satisfaction, destination attachment, and revisit intention (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Hosany & Prayag, 2013).

Exclusive cultural events offer several strategic advantages for Bali's sustainable tourism agenda. First, they support controlled visitor flows, reducing overcrowding and environmental pressure. Second, they attract higher-value market segments who are willing to pay more for meaningful and authentic experiences. Third, they create opportunities for stronger community participation by involving local artists, cultural practitioners, culinary entrepreneurs, and customary institutions. Fourth, they help preserve cultural integrity by presenting traditions in a respectful and curated manner rather than through excessive commercialization (Richards, 2017; Dredge, 2022). Therefore, exclusive cultural events represent a pathway that combines economic viability, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Community participation is a crucial element in this development model. Sustainable tourism cannot be achieved without meaningful involvement of local stakeholders. Community-based cultural events strengthen social cohesion, reinforce local identity, and

facilitate intergenerational transfer of knowledge and traditions (Liang et al., 2023; Murphy, 1985). When local communities are involved as co-creators rather than passive objects of tourism, economic benefits can be distributed more equitably while maintaining authenticity. In Bali, where traditional institutions and customary villages play a major role in regulating cultural spaces, collaborative event design becomes especially important (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

Digital transformation also plays an increasingly significant role in contemporary event development. Selective digital storytelling, niche market targeting, and curated online promotion can help Bali reach high-value tourists without relying on mass promotion (El Archi et al., 2023; Xiang et al., 2021). However, excessive dependence on viral social media exposure may undermine exclusivity and trigger renewed overtourism pressures. Viral tourism trends may destabilize destinations by overwhelming infrastructure and diluting cultural meaning (Sustacha et al., 2023). Therefore, digital strategies for exclusive cultural events must be carefully managed to support sustainability objectives rather than simply maximize visibility (Song & Wondirad, 2023).

Although Bali hosts numerous festivals, ceremonies, and cultural performances, empirical research focusing specifically on exclusive cultural events as a strategic tool for sustainable tourism remains limited. Most previous studies emphasize large-scale festivals or general cultural tourism development, leaving a gap in understanding how curated, intimate, and experience-driven event formats can contribute to quality tourism while preserving cultural authenticity. This gap is particularly important for Bali, where tourism growth must increasingly be balanced with environmental resilience and cultural sustainability (UNWTO, 2023).

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates strategies for developing exclusive cultural events in Bali through a qualitative case study approach involving expert practitioners in event management and tourism. SWOT analysis is employed to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats influencing the implementation of exclusive cultural events. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on exclusive, immersive, and value-oriented cultural events as a model for sustainable destination development. Specifically, this study aims to formulate strategic directions that align cultural preservation, economic competitiveness, visitor quality, and community empowerment, thereby positioning Bali as a leading sustainable cultural destination in the global tourism market.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore strategies for developing exclusive cultural events in support of sustainable tourism in Bali (Yin, 2018). Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by capturing participants' perspectives within their real-life contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The case study design was selected to examine contemporary practices of exclusive cultural event management in Bali and to identify strategic patterns emerging from professional experience. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with five expert informants selected using purposive sampling. This sampling technique is appropriate for selecting participants with relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Patton, 2015). The informants consisted of one event strategist (Informant A), one project manager (Informant B), one venue manager (Informant C), and two practitioners specializing in premium and intimate cultural events (Informants D and E). All participants possess extensive experience in cultural event production, destination branding, and tourism development in Bali. This sampling strategy ensured that the data reflected informed professional insights relevant to exclusive cultural events.

The interviews were conducted in December 2025, with each session lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Primary data were obtained from these interviews, while secondary data were gathered from academic publications, industry reports, and documentation related to cultural events and tourism in Bali. The interviews focused on key

themes, including the characteristics of exclusive cultural events, their contribution to sustainability, operational challenges, community involvement, and effective promotional strategies.

Data analysis followed a thematic qualitative approach, supported by SWOT analysis to systematically identify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats influencing exclusive cultural events in Bali. The analytical process involved data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation, enabling the synthesis of empirical findings into strategic insights (Miles et al., 2014). Triangulation across interview data and documentary sources was applied to enhance credibility and analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Exclusive Cultural Events for Sustainable Tourism
 Source: Author’s conceptualization (2025)

Result and Discussion

This study explores strategic pathways for developing exclusive cultural events to support sustainable tourism in Bali, drawing on in-depth interviews with five expert practitioners in event management and tourism development. The findings are presented thematically and integrated with a SWOT framework to generate strategic insights.

Table 1. Thematic Findings from Expert Interviews

Theme	Key Insight	Implications for Sustainable Tourism
Experiential Exclusivity	Exclusive cultural events emphasize curated storytelling, limited participation, and immersive settings	Enhances emotional engagement and visitor loyalty while reducing mass tourism pressure
Cultural Authenticity	Strong involvement of local artists, ritual leaders, and traditional institutions	Preserves cultural integrity and strengthens community ownership
Economic Value Creation	Higher per-capita spending through premium experiences and localized supply chains	Supports SMEs, artisans, and cultural practitioners

Environmental Control	Small-scale formats enable better waste management and energy efficiency	Minimizes environmental footprint
Operational Challenges	Limited HR capacity, misalignment with adat institutions, risk of viral exposure	Requires professional training and selective digital promotion

Source: Author’s analysis (2025)

Characteristics of Exclusive Cultural Events in Bali

The experts consistently emphasized that exclusive cultural events differ fundamentally from conventional cultural festivals in terms of experiential depth, audience segmentation, and cultural sensitivity. Rather than prioritizing scale, these events focus on curated storytelling, limited participation, and immersive spatial design. Participants highlighted that exclusive events in Bali are typically built around intimate settings, personalized narratives, and respectful engagement with sacred cultural elements. One informant (Informant A, interview, 5 December 2025) explained that “guests today are not only looking for performances, but for stories, meaning, and emotional connection with Balinese culture.” Another participant (Informant B, interview, 8 December 2025) noted that smaller audiences allow organizers to create more interactive programs, such as private cultural workshops, guided temple heritage experiences, and curated dining sessions inspired by local traditions.

Several experts also stressed that exclusivity should not be interpreted solely as luxury or high price, but as carefully designed authenticity and meaningful access. According to one respondent (Informant C, interview, 11 December 2025), “exclusive means limited, personal, and memorable not necessarily expensive.” Others emphasized the importance of collaboration with local communities to ensure that rituals, symbols, and sacred spaces are presented respectfully and with proper permission (Informant D, interview, 14 December 2025; Informant E, interview, 17 December 2025).

These findings reinforce contemporary perspectives on experiential tourism, where emotional engagement and authenticity shape visitor satisfaction and destination loyalty (Chen & Rahman, 2023). In Bali’s context, exclusivity is not merely defined by restricted access but by the quality of interaction between visitors, cultural practitioners, and local communities. This approach aligns with transformative tourism theory, which frames cultural immersion as a catalyst for deeper understanding and personal growth (Kirillova et al., 2017).

Contribution of Exclusive Cultural Events to Sustainable Tourism

Participants identified multiple sustainability outcomes associated with exclusive cultural events. Socially, such events foster cultural pride and strengthen community cohesion by involving local artists, ritual leaders, and small enterprises in event production. One participant (Informant A, interview, 5 December 2025) stated that exclusive events create stronger connections between visitors and residents because local communities are directly involved as cultural hosts rather than passive spectators. Another respondent (Informant D, interview, 14 December 2025) added that these events also encourage younger generations to appreciate and participate in preserving Balinese traditions.

Economically, exclusive formats generate higher per-capita spending and support localized value chains, benefiting artisans, performers, and hospitality providers. According to Informant B (interview, 8 December 2025), visitors attending premium cultural experiences are generally more willing to pay for handcrafted products, personalized services, and authentic local cuisine. Similarly, Informant C (interview, 11 December 2025) emphasized that smaller but higher-spending audiences often provide better economic returns than large-scale low-spending crowds.

Environmentally, limited audience size allows for better control of waste management, energy use, and spatial carrying capacity. Informant E (interview, 17 December 2025) explained that smaller events are easier to manage in terms of waste reduction, traffic flow, and venue

cleanliness, especially in culturally sensitive areas. These findings resonate with recent research emphasizing quality tourism as a strategy to mitigate overtourism while enhancing economic yield (UNWTO, 2023).

By prioritizing curated experiences over mass participation, exclusive cultural events enable destinations to balance visitor satisfaction with environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Moreover, the collaborative nature of these events reflects community-based tourism principles, which enhance social legitimacy and local value creation (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018).

Operational Challenges and Strategic Constraints

Despite their potential, exclusive cultural events face significant challenges. Experts highlighted limitations in human resource capacity, particularly in experience design, hospitality standards, and cultural interpretation. One participant (Informant B, interview, 8 December 2025) explained that many event teams are technically capable of organizing ceremonies or performances, but still lack the skills to package them into premium and memorable visitor experiences. Another respondent (Informant C, interview, 11 December 2025) added that trained personnel who understand both tourism service quality and Balinese cultural values remain limited.

In addition, misalignment between event organizers and traditional institutions often complicates planning processes, as cultural protocols require extended consultation and trust-building. Informant D (interview, 14 December 2025) noted that coordination with customary villages and ritual leaders cannot be rushed, because permissions, timing, and sacred boundaries must be respected carefully. Informant A (interview, 5 December 2025) further emphasized that successful exclusive events depend heavily on long-term relationships with local communities rather than short-term commercial arrangements.

Another critical constraint involves digital exposure. While online platforms are essential for reaching international markets, excessive social media visibility risks undermining exclusivity and accelerating mass visitation. Informant E (interview, 17 December 2025) stated that once a niche cultural experience becomes viral online, demand may increase beyond the site's carrying capacity and reduce the intimate atmosphere expected by guests. This tension mirrors broader concerns regarding viral tourism and destination overcrowding (Seraphin et al., 2018).

Furthermore, limited technological innovation in event production and data-driven marketing restricts the ability to target high-value visitor segments effectively. According to Informant B (interview, 8 December 2025), many organizers still rely on conventional promotion rather than using customer databases, personalization tools, or strategic partnerships with premium travel networks.

SWOT Analysis and Strategic Positioning

The SWOT analysis reveals that Bali possesses substantial internal strengths, including authentic cultural heritage, strong destination branding, and established institutional support. External opportunities are driven by the global shift toward quality tourism, increasing demand for immersive cultural experiences, and growing potential for cross-sector collaboration.

Tabel 2. SWOT Matrix of Exclusive Cultural Events in Bali

Internal Factors	External Factors
Strengths (S)	Opportunities (O)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic cultural heritage • Strong destination branding • Institutional support • Rich community-based cultural assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing global demand for quality tourism • Increasing interest in immersive experiences

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-sector collaboration potential
Weaknesses (W) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited professional HR capacity • Insufficient digital innovation • Fragmented coordination with <i>adat</i> institutions 	Threats (T) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominance of mass tourism • Cultural commodification • Risk of social media overexposure

Source: Author’s SWOT synthesis (2025)

However, internal weaknesses persist in the form of limited professional capacity and insufficient integration of digital tools, while external threats stem from mass tourism dominance, cultural commodification, and uncontrolled media exposure. The IFAS and EFAS matrices place Bali in Quadrant I, indicating a favorable strategic position that supports an aggressive growth-oriented strategy. Accordingly, this study proposes an SO (Strength–Opportunity) strategy that leverages Bali’s cultural assets and market positioning to develop curated, community-based exclusive events targeting high-value tourists. Key strategic directions include:

1. Strengthening community co-creation in event planning to ensure cultural authenticity and equitable economic distribution.
2. Enhancing experiential design capabilities through professional training in storytelling, immersive staging, and cultural interpretation.
3. Implementing selective digital marketing to reach quality tourism segments while maintaining experiential exclusivity.
4. Integrating sustainability standards into operational practices, including local sourcing, waste reduction, and controlled visitor flows.

These strategies reflect contemporary calls for destination-specific, experience-driven tourism development that aligns economic objectives with sociocultural and environmental sustainability (Liang et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that exclusive cultural events represent a viable strategic pathway for advancing sustainable tourism in Bali. By emphasizing curated experiences, community participation, and controlled visitor engagement, such events can enhance cultural preservation while generating higher economic value and minimizing environmental pressure. The findings indicate that Bali’s strong cultural assets and global destination image provide a solid foundation for implementing quality tourism strategies through exclusive cultural events. The integration of expert insights and SWOT analysis highlights the importance of leveraging internal strengths and external opportunities through aggressive yet culturally sensitive strategies. Practically, this research offers guidance for policymakers, event organizers, and destination managers in designing community-based, immersive cultural events that align with sustainability objectives. Theoretically, this study contributes to event management literature by positioning exclusivity and experiential design as central mechanisms linking cultural events with sustainable tourism development.

Future research is encouraged to explore visitor perspectives and quantitatively assess the long-term impacts of exclusive cultural events on community well-being and environmental performance.

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